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SPAIN: Spanish Goals and Strategy in the

Bilateral Security Talks [redacted]

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Summary

In the opening round of bilateral security talks on 10 July, Spanish negotiators pressed Washington hard to withdraw almost completely from Torrejon Air Base near Madrid and to reduce the overall US military presence in Spain by nearly one-half. Despite their tough opening position, we believe they are asking for a larger reduction than they hope to achieve--or could even handle. Prime Minister Gonzalez and his advisers still tend to view the issue in narrow domestic political terms and apparently have not thought much yet about the impact of their proposals on Spanish and Western security, US aid levels, and the already strained Spanish military budget. As these realities loom larger, we believe the generally pragmatic Prime Minister is likely to tilt toward compromise with Washington. Although Madrid will probably continue to push hard to relocate the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing away from Torrejon, we see some room for maneuver even on this issue if the Spanish can be convinced that moving the wing would weaken Western defenses and require Madrid to assume the substantial cost of maintaining that base largely on its own. [redacted]

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Madrid's Starting Position

Spanish officials adopted a tough initial bargaining position on 10 July when they met with US counterparts to set the

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stage for indepth negotiations in the fall. They are prepared to accept a largely intact US presence at Rota Naval Base, but want drastic reductions in the permanent US presence at Torrejon, Zaragoza, and Moron air bases.* [redacted]

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The guiding principle they propose is that the United States cease home basing forces at Spanish airbases, retaining only the rights to exercise in or out of them and to deploy there in an emergency. This plan would permit stationing only enough US personnel at the air bases to maintain the communications and logistics needed to support those periodic operations. The Spanish themselves would assume responsibility for maintaining the remaining US infrastructure requirements. [redacted]

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This list varies somewhat from the proposals previewed by Spanish officials in meetings with US officials earlier this year. The withdrawal of the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing from Torrejon has consistently been at the head of their list, but in the spring they had been less emphatic about the withdrawal of US tanker aircraft from Zaragoza and Moron. Earlier hints, on the other hand, that Spain wanted to take over some US installations that do not have a direct military mission [redacted] have stopped. [redacted]

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In addition to demanding a reduction in the size of the US presence, Spanish officials hinted on 10 July that they were aiming to restrict the freedom of US forces to engage in out-of-area operations from or through Spanish bases. The current bilateral agreement calls for case-by-case approvals, but the Spanish are clearly concerned that they need tighter restrictions to prevent Spain from being associated with US military actions it does not support--a concern heightened by the US raid on Libya in April. The Spanish press has noted, for example, that the USS Coral Sea left directly from a Spanish port to participate in the raid and that some of the supporting tankers had only recently redeployed from Zaragoza to England. Although Spanish officials have yet to put forward any formal strictures to preclude these

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kinds of activities, they have mused aloud about the issue in talks with US officials and are likely to pursue it further this fall. [REDACTED]

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Despite their efforts to scale down the bilateral agreement, the Spanish will seek increased security assistance.

- They are particularly likely to press for grant aid to further the modernization of their armed forces. After grudgingly accepting US arguments in 1982 that Washington was phasing out assistance of that sort to European countries, they were angered when it was continued for Turkey, Greece, and Portugal.
- The Spanish are also likely to push for a specific US commitment to help construct the Combat Grande early warning system in southern Spain. Madrid argues that Washington has not lived up to its pledged "best efforts" on that project.
- Spanish negotiators will probably also call on the United States to buy more Spanish military materiel and allow greater Spanish participation in military coproduction.

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Spanish Negotiating Tactics

When the talks resume in October, the Spanish are likely to argue, as they did on 10 July, that the two sides should resolve the question of US troop reductions before moving on to the other issues involved in renewing the bilateral agreement. They may contend that they made an important concession last year when Spain agreed to fold talks on reducing the US military presence into negotiations to renew the bilateral agreement; building on this, they may claim that they only agreed to that course on the assumption that US cutbacks would be the first item on the agenda of the larger talks. They are also likely to argue that Gonzalez needs a quick agreement on reductions to fulfill the promise he made to voters during the NATO referendum campaign--that, indeed, Gonzalez's pledge to reduce the US military presence was a major factor in the success of the March referendum. They also are likely to contend that a deal along those lines would produce a favorable climate for handling the remaining bilateral issues. Madrid clearly calculates that troop cutbacks are the principal quid Washington has to offer and that, once it is expended, Spain's bargaining position will be strengthened for the remaining aspects of the negotiations. [REDACTED]

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The Spanish will continue to try to back off from the commitment they made last December to substitute Spanish forces

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directly on a mission-by-mission basis for any US forces that Washington agrees to withdraw from Spain.* They have tried to explain away these earlier offers as "unrealistic" and inconsistent with other, less specific language in the communique on force substitution. In fact, this reluctance probably reflects a growing realization that there are few areas where they could hope to achieve a one-for-one substitution for US missions. [REDACTED]

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The Spanish almost certainly will continue to support their position on troop substitution by arguing that US troop withdrawal from Spain and Spanish membership in NATO are parts of a single package, and that this package represents a net increase in Western security. They will point out that they have proposed to increase Madrid's participation in NATO substantially and are likely to argue that this linkage should be no surprise to Washington. Gonzalez made the linkage explicitly in the ten-point security program he presented to parliament in October 1984. [REDACTED]

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Spanish negotiators clearly intend to buttress their case by citing domestic political pressures and will probably contend that public opinion now is insisting on a substantial US cutback. They may claim that anti-Western activists have responded to defeat in the NATO referendum by transferring their energies to the base question. Spanish leaders are also likely to argue that the recent success of parties critical of the US military presence--former Prime Minister Suarez's Social Democratic Center party and the Communists increased their parliamentary strength from 2 to 19 and 4 to 7 deputies, respectively, in the election on 22 June--adds to the pressure on them to obtain US cutbacks. [REDACTED]

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Press manipulation is likely to play a role in Spanish efforts to convince Washington that public opinion demands major US concessions. Indeed, we believe that Spanish leaders will try to use the press to exert maximum pressure on the United States while Spanish negotiators attempt to maintain a relatively amicable atmosphere at the bargaining table. They foreshadowed this approach during informal conversations with US officials this spring when they used leaks to emphasize Spanish determination to achieve their goals. The press has repeatedly carried warnings from Spanish officials--sometimes even on an attributed basis--that Madrid will abrogate the bases accord unilaterally if Washington does not agree to a better deal for Spain. [REDACTED]

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There is no indication that Gonzalez himself has considered or would consider unilateral abrogation, but we suspect that he did approve raising the possibility in the press to put pressure on the US. Even though there is no evidence that this threatening talk reflects the real thinking of the government, these stories could raise public expectations and reduce the government's room for maneuver. We do not believe this has been a serious problem so far, but the role the press played in pushing Gonzalez into the politically risky NATO referendum suggests the dangers cannot be completely discounted. [REDACTED]

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Gonzalez himself probably will keep a low profile during the base talks--authorizing his negotiators to press the United States hard, but leaving himself publicly uncommitted to any particular position so he can put the best face on whatever accord eventually results. We believe he would hesitate to risk his prestige unless he saw an opportunity for a breakthrough. In that case he might, for example, appeal directly to US leaders in hopes that his victory in the referendum on NATO membership and his other efforts to improve Spain's ties with the West have won him enough good will to engender a concession from Washington. He would not take this risk lightly, however--an earlier effort at personal diplomacy in the runup to the NATO referendum ended in embarrassment when he was able to see the President for only a few minutes. [REDACTED]

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The Pressures on Madrid--Real or Notional?

We believe the pressures on the Spanish government are real, but not nearly as compelling as Madrid would have us believe. Spanish leaders have a point when they say that public opinion favors a substantial reduction in the US military presence, but they have overstated it considerably. Unlike Socialist Party activists, the Spanish public at large showed little interest in the base issue until recently. Although opinion surveys revealed broad opposition to stationing US forces in Spain, that sentiment did not run very deep and few voters gave the issue much thought. The Communists, for example, tried for more than a decade to stir indignation over the US military presence, but to little avail. [REDACTED]

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It took Gonzalez himself to move the issue to the front burner by coupling US troop cutbacks with continued NATO membership. Not only was that linkage a shrewd tactical ploy, it also accorded with his own foreign policy goals--less dependence on the United States and greater integration into Western Europe. In fact, a senior aide to Gonzalez underscored to the US Ambassador in May that the base issue meant a great deal to Gonzalez and advised Washington to exercise caution in

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dealing with him on it. The Prime Minister is a strong nationalist and--like many of his fellow Socialists--he probably still thinks of the bilateral agreement, at least in part, as a product of late dictator Franco's willingness to trade an important measure of Spanish sovereignty for US help in propping up his government. [REDACTED]

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This is not to say that Gonzalez's political future hangs on winning everything that Spanish officials have placed or might place on the negotiating table. Obviously, Suarez and the Communists will criticize almost any deal he comes up with, but the Prime Minister has a commanding parliamentary majority--184 seats out of 350, compared to 19 for Suarez and seven for the Communists. Moreover, he does not have to face the electorate for four years--long enough for even diehard leftist memories to fade. [REDACTED]

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Meanwhile, there are political pressures impelling Gonzalez toward compromise and flexibility. An open conflict with Washington could hurt him politically in the long run, even though wrapping himself in nationalist colors and taking on Washington would be popular in the short term. We believe he recognizes that a transatlantic contretemps would alarm many conservatives, undermine business confidence, and damage the hard-earned moderate image that has played a significant role in his political success. Moreover, Gonzalez will have added incentive to compromise once US negotiators make it clear that decreased US use of Spanish facilities would reduce direct US aid as well as the considerable indirect US contribution to the already badly strained Spanish military budget. [REDACTED]

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Gonzalez also can count on the complexity of the base issue to give him room to maneuver with Spanish public opinion--substantially more than he had, for example, with the question of NATO membership. The voters' perception of Spanish participation in the Atlantic Alliance as a simple yes or no issue made the NATO question difficult for Gonzalez to finesse. The debate on the US military presence in Spain, on the other hand, is a matter of regulating the size and location of the US presence, not eliminating it. Spanish voters are not likely, in our view, to possess the sophistication or interest to follow a protracted debate about the relative merits of this or that point on a sliding scale. [REDACTED]

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We believe the most difficult political point for Gonzalez will be the status of Torrejon because of its proximity to Madrid and the national media. Anti-US activists probably would win some political mileage if the 401st is allowed to stay at Torrejon. Even here, however, Gonzalez probably could get away with asserting that the 401st performs a key role which Spain cannot yet assume. [REDACTED]

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His job would be considerably facilitated by cosmetic adjustments that could be represented as significant US concessions even though they would have little impact on US operational requirements. For example, even though the Spanish press has occasionally noted that current US troop strength--about 10,000 men--already is approximately 20 percent below the authorized ceiling, we believe that a reduction in authorized troop strength to actual current levels would be well received. Relabeling US-used facilities as NATO installations is another cosmetic change that could have a positive impact. Similarly, Spanish defense thinking has historically focused on "the threat from the South," and we believe indications that the US military presence helps to defend against that threat could reduce anti-US sentiment. Highlighting the US presence at Rota and Moron--or partially redeploying to those bases--could further this perception. So too would publicizing any aid for completion of the Combat Grande air defense system in southern Spain. Although the Spanish are worried primarily by the perceived threat from North Africa, offense to Morocco could be minimized if a US reorientation to the south were presented as part of a general effort to improve anti-Soviet defenses on NATO's southern flank.

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Present State of Spanish Thinking

There are indications that the Spanish have not yet thought through the implications of the changes they are asking for and that their negotiating position is still evolving. So far, Madrid seems to have focused more on domestic political considerations than on operational military requirements. In a conversation with the US Ambassador in May, for example, Gonzalez's Cabinet Chief, Robert Dorado, outlined the beneficial impact that withdrawal of the 401st would have on Spanish attitudes toward the United States. Dorado took little account of the costs and other difficulties connected with a move of that magnitude, and, when the Ambassador raised those points, he speculated vaguely that perhaps those problems could be solved by moving the unit to Rota. More predictably, Spanish military officers--who largely favor retaining the current level of US presence--have been equally loose, speculating freely with their US counterparts that relabeling US-used facilities as NATO installations would suffice to defuse some of the public opposition to the US military presence.

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Periodic shows of casualness by Spanish officials toward the pragmatic aspects of the base talks and their tendency on occasion to ruminate openly with US officials about fundamental aspects of the bilateral relationship suggest that there may be considerable flexibility in their negotiating position. Although they certainly want to reduce the US military presence and are

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especially interested in removing the 401st from Torrejon, we do not believe that they have decided exactly what they want to get out of the talks. To a significant degree, we believe, they are simply trying to see how much they can get by pressing hard for what they themselves may recognize as an outsized wish list. [REDACTED]

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The tentativeness of the Spanish position is underscored, in our view, by Gonzalez's evident reluctance to commit himself publicly on how much of a US reduction he is seeking. Deputy Prime Minister Alfonso Guerra and other Spanish officials have presumably had Gonzalez's approval for their public posturing, but none of their statements binds the government to any particular conclusion in the base talks. Indeed, in some respects the government appears to be trying to deflate public expectations. For more than a year, press leaks and occasional public statements by officials have acknowledged the considerable contribution that the United States makes to the Spanish defense budget through its military presence. More recent leaks indicate that although Spanish negotiators will seek substantial--if frequently ill-defined--US cuts, they also expect that the talks will be long and tough and that the outcome is uncertain. Leaks, unsourced background briefings, and occasional official statements have also foreshadowed the government's determination to stop short of US cutbacks that would endanger Western security. [REDACTED]

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In addition to preparing public opinion for possible acceptance of a less than wholesale reduction in the US military presence, we believe that statements of this sort reflect the conviction of Gonzalez and other leaders that Spain has an obligation to support US efforts to maintain Western defense. Gonzalez has worked hard to achieve what he now views as his status as a Western leader. We believe that the high value he places on that role will discourage him from precipitating a major dust up with Washington over the bases. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

As long as pitfalls are avoided, Gonzalez will probably retain the room for maneuver to arrive at an agreement acceptable to Washington as well as Spanish public opinion. Although the outline of an eventual agreement remains murky, it seems clear that Spain will push hard to move the 401st out of Torrejon. We believe, though, that there is a reasonable chance of winning the Spanish over even on this question--especially if they become persuaded that the unit's placement there is important to Western defense efforts and that its withdrawal would have serious negative repercussions on Spain's own defense budget. Not that reaching agreement will be easy; past bilateral negotiations on US use of Spanish bases were tough even without a public Spanish commitment to reduce the US presence, and the forthcoming talks almost certainly will prove to be at least as tough.

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